A Short Story About Self-Esteem
"Don't Blame Yourself"

By Habib ollah Noorani

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Ahmad grabbed his phone, slammed the door angrily, and headed toward the big hill. On the way, he cried constantly, talked to himself, and kept cursing. You might have guessed it right—Ahmad was going to throw himself off the hill. It was a very hard decision. Ahmad was a middle-aged man who saw himself as a complete failure in life and had no hope left for things to get better.

The last time he argued with his wife, she called him a weak, useless, and stupid man. Ahmad loved his wife deeply. He couldn't understand or accept those words. He got furious, broke several plates, and hurled insults back at her. In all their life together, she had never seen him this angry. She was shocked. She went to him to calm him down, but it didn't work. He got even angrier. It was as if a completely different person had been born from that calm, gentle man.

Ahmad walked toward the hill. He thought to himself, "I will never see this desert again. My eyes will never again look upon these stars." This was his last trip to the big hill. He walked through the darkness and the desert. His whole life, he had been afraid of farm dogs. But this time was different. He wasn't afraid of anything. When someone has reached their end, what difference does it make how they die? Whether he fell off the hill or got killed by dogs—it didn't matter.

There was a deep stream of water that he barely managed to cross. Then the mountain appeared before his eyes. This mountain was familiar to Ahmad. He had memories with it. He always came here for walks on weekends. It was as if all the stones and all the paths knew him. Recently, they had built a walking path at the bottom of the mountain. In the dark of night, mostly middle-aged and retired people came here to walk.

When Ahmad got close to the mountain, his crying and sobbing got worse. He said to the mountain, "You know, this time I didn't come for a walk. This time I came to hide myself inside you. If you place me among these rocks and stones, I will find everlasting peace. I want to become a thorn or a stone in this mountain and stay here for thousands of years."

Ahmad was exhausted from being human. From awareness. From the disloyalty of humans. From himself. He saw peace in death.

He thought about his two daughters. He said, "They will be very sad after I die." It was as if something inside him wanted to slowly show him what he had and call him toward survival and continuing life. Ahmad thought for a moment, then got angry and said, "No. It's true I love

them, but they too will grow up and go their own way. I've left enough money for them. They will be fine. My children are not a strong enough reason to keep living."

He turned back to the walking path. There were lights there, and the path was bright. He struggled up the rocks and sat in a crevice among some stones so no one would hear him crying. In that moment, his entire life passed before his eyes.

****His Childhood****

He remembered his childhood. His father had abandoned them and gone to a distant city. Ahmad constantly cursed his father. But sometimes he understood why his father left—because his mother was so ill-tempered and difficult. Yes, even though his father had four sons, one day he got tired of fighting with his mother. He divorced her, left everything for them, and left. People in the village said he had gone south and taken a new wife. Ahmad was seven years old when this happened.

Ahmad was the second son. His father paid some attention to him. After the father left, the mother became the one in charge, and the older brother, Sadegh, gained new power. When the father was around, Sadegh was nothing. His father didn't like him at all. The father loved Ahmad the most. But after the father left, Sadegh, who had a very strong build, took charge and gained all the power. He constantly beat the mother and the children, especially Ahmad.

Ahmad cried among the rocks and called out to his father: "You know, Dad? Sadegh beat me badly. Very badly." Sadegh was a very controlling and bullying person. Ahmad always had to be careful around him because the smallest mistake would lead to a severe beating.

Ahmad also had a very bad mother. She only carried the name of motherhood. She never hugged Ahmad or the other children. She never once told them she loved them. The mother constantly saw them as extra burdens who had wasted her youth. Ahmad sometimes thought, "Maybe it's good that Father left. If he had stayed, I couldn't have watched him fall apart." But his father had run away. He couldn't stay anymore. But Ahmad was a child. He didn't understand the meaning of running away. He had no choice but to stay and endure.

He remembered something. Once, he saw a mother sitting in front of her house, waiting for her child. A boy named Amir. When the mother saw him, she lit up, smiled, came forward, and—right in front of Ahmad—kissed her son's forehead. Ahmad could never forget that scene in all his life. A mother, a waiting gaze, a kind smile—and the height of it all, the kiss on the forehead. Amir was so lucky that God had given him such a blessing.

Ahmad remembered. He always slept alone. He wished just once someone would say goodnight to him at bedtime. But he always fell asleep with his imagination.

****School and Growing Up****

Then Ahmad went to school. His grades were very bad. For this reason, he constantly faced criticism from his mother and brother. Until he went to the next village for high school. The village of Hassanabad was a miracle for Ahmad. The teachers were good to him and liked him very much. Especially a Persian teacher named Mr. Rashid, who was a very kind and gentle man. It was as if Mr. Rashid had seen Ahmad's wounds. He was very kind to him and encouraged him in front of everyone.

The encouragement and the different way that Mr. Rashid looked at him changed Ahmad's life. He went from very low grades to the highest grades in the class. For the first time in his life, Ahmad found himself in a good, beautiful place that helped him grow. He finished high school with excellent grades.

But Ahmad was always unable to make friends. Whenever he found a friend, he wanted them completely for himself. It was as if he wanted to turn his friend into a mother. He wanted to control his friend and possess them. That's why his friendships never lasted long. Everyone who got close to him eventually got tired of him. Ahmad was like a beggar calling out for love, searching for a mother everywhere.

****University and Heartbreak****

Then he went to university and got his bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering from a good university. While doing his master's, Ahmad met a girl named Hadith. He fell deeply in love with her. He intended to marry her. But after some time, Hadith left him and became friends with someone else from the university.

Ahmad had done everything for Hadith. He was completely at her service. He bought her nice gifts. He tolerated all her complaints. He was always available for her. But he never understood why one day she came and told him she wasn't worthy of him and he should go find his own life.

Ahmad fell apart. He lost all trust in all the girls in the city. He never understood why it happened. He was always available and loved her with all his heart, but she ran away from him. Maybe Hadith had found nothing left in Ahmad to discover. A man who is too easily available, with nothing left to discover, who never gets angry or upset—maybe that tires anyone's heart. But whatever the reason, this event made Ahmad bitter toward all the girls in the city. He saw them all as disloyal.

****Marriage to Kobra****

After finishing his studies, Ahmad started working at the city's electricity company and settled there. He went back to his village to visit his mother. His mother said, "Ahmad, come marry Kobra, the neighbor's daughter. She's a very smart and clever girl." Ahmad thought for a while. He was tired and hopeless after Hadith and all the city girls. He agreed.

And so Ahmad and Kobra started their life together in the new city. After a few months, Ahmad was able to buy a house and they moved in. Two years later, their first daughter was born, and one year after that, their second.

At first, Kobra had a good relationship with Ahmad. She was a good wife. But slowly, her behavior and attitude changed. Ahmad's financial situation had become very good. She started asking for a lot of pocket money. Ahmad, who loved her, agreed. After a while, Kobra asked for her own car. Ahmad, who had no one in the world but Kobra, agreed. Then he even bought a villa in the north in Kobra's name.

Kobra made new friends who were very different from the village girls. Sometimes she would meet their husbands too. After finding these new friends, she constantly started comparing Ahmad to their husbands. One day she would say, "You should buy this cologne." Another day, "Look what my friend's husband did for her." Her demands kept changing, and Ahmad did everything to please her.

They had two very big fights. She no longer compared Ahmad to village men or relatives. She compared him to her friends' husbands. Ahmad was intensely attached to Kobra. He fell apart badly several times. Loving Kobra and continuing the relationship had become something conditional.

Ahmad loved Kobra so much that he looked at himself through her eyes. A "worthy" man was someone who had a villa, bought very expensive clothes for his wife, was well-groomed. Ahmad had become so lost in Kobra that he had no standards of his own. Kobra's standards had become carved into his mind and soul. Kobra had also fallen into the trap of comparison. Ahmad felt like he was slowly losing his wife. He felt inadequate.

He spent a lot of time depressed. He kept walking and thinking about his life, especially about Kobra, sometimes about Hadith, sometimes about his mother.

Ahmad's rope of attachment and love for Kobra was about to break. He kept trying to be the way Kobra wanted, but her demands kept changing. It was as if Ahmad had become a tamed dog who had given his leash to Kobra. He no longer had any choice of his own. He felt the rope was about to snap. Their fights had become very intense over the past few months.

****The Last Fight****

Then one day, Ahmad came home and Kobra started on him again. She said her friend's husband had thrown her a big birthday party in a large hall—and Ahmad had only bought her a small bracelet.

That was perhaps the last sentence that made Ahmad understand he had lost everything. He realized that his love for Kobra was going nowhere. He had tried to be what she wanted. But after many years and many nights, it was no longer possible. Ahmad had collapsed so much from all the comparisons that nothing was left to fall apart.

The last thread of love had snapped.

He turned red. He was so upset that he grabbed a glass and threw it toward the wall. The children ran away in fear. Kobra got very scared. She went to the kitchen table and turned all the dishes over. That man had become someone else. Kobra panicked. She went to him, wanting to comfort him, to apologize. But it was useless. He put on his clothes and went outside.

****At the Mountain****

Yes, Ahmad was up on the mountain that dark night, sitting in a crevice among the rocks. He could see the moon. He looked at the stars for the last time. Constant crying had worn him out. He turned off his phone. He looked up at the stars, the only companions of his loneliness, and said, "Why did my life turn out like this? Why did Father leave? Did Father run away? Did I not deserve a mother? Did I not deserve a mother's smile? Why, when my brother was beating me, did no one come to help me?"

He was at the end of the line. It was the last night of his life, the last time he would see the stars. He sat on a rock, listening to the sound of people walking on the path.

He wanted to throw himself off the mountain that night. But it didn't happen. Dawn came too soon. He stayed another day in the crevice among the rocks. He drank some water that had collected there. He took off his shirt, used it as a pillow, and slept in the shade until the next night, planning to finish it the following night.

Night fell. The stars came out again. The walkers started coming and going again. This time, he had made his decision. He would finish it this time. He would find peace. He would become one with this mountain that he loved. Maybe he would become a stone. Maybe a bush. He wanted to be anything except human—except the awareness that brought him pain.

He reviewed his life one last time. It was true that his childhood was very difficult. But now he had two beautiful daughters, a house, a villa, a car, and savings. What was missing from his life that had driven him to such ruin? He cursed Kobra again for being ungrateful and disloyal.

Yes. Ahmad knew he had everything except happiness, love, and warmth—the kind that should always be with him. He had never been able to possess love. He bought a villa. He became rich. But the love and warmth of life were not in his hands. They were in Kobra's hands. Whenever Kobra was full of warmth and praised him, he soared. But lately, there was no Kobra or her love left. Ahmad had no more energy to continue.

He blamed the universe again for depriving him of a mother's love and a father's support. He kept complaining to existence itself.

****Therapy and Meditation****

When the fights with Kobra increased, Ahmad had gone to therapy. But he found no answers. The improvement was only temporary. His old states would return. He also tried attending meditation classes, as his psychologist suggested. He tried hard, but got no results. When he meditated, he found only an empty awareness inside—a pure consciousness with no warmth, no kindness, no light. Meditation was fine, but it was an empty awareness. It didn't attract him.

He had nothing left to lose. He saw that all his possessions were not enough to keep living. He had been called a worthless man. A man who had tried for years and years.

That night was the last night. The last time his eyes would gaze at these planets and stars. He loved the stars and always wondered where their end was and why they were so beautiful. But that wasn't his field. He just liked looking at them, like a beautiful painting in the sky.

Ahmad wanted to enjoy what he was seeing one last time. The stones, the mountain. He looked inside himself and said, "Enough. Being human is enough." Ahmad wasn't afraid of death. It's just a moment, short. Then you join these lifeless things, which are better than the harsh human world.

It was as if something inside wanted to invite him to life, but something destructive kept reminding him of all his useless achievements. He reviewed them again and again. He found nothing that could make him want to continue living.

He looked up at the mountain. He needed to climb higher. Up there was a big cliff. He would have to throw himself down the other side. He climbed up slowly so the walkers wouldn't notice. He had finally made his decision. Whatever happens, happens. Nothing good had come to him from being human. Maybe he would become a stone or a thorn in the world of lifeless things.

He reached the highest point of the mountain. He paused for a moment. He decided not to look down. A part of his being found peace in the darkness. He said, "Good. Now I am free from everything. From Kobra, from Hadith, from my mother, from myself, from all human duties."

He said, "Maybe being human isn't an honor. Who said humans are the best? This stone, this bush—I say they are the best. They all sit together and create a beautiful picture on the mountain. Maybe I will become part of them too."

Ahmad looked one last time at the stars. Then he moved toward the cliff.

He stood close to the edge. He looked around. At the sky. At the stars. A part of him invited him toward the darkness. Another part waited for a miracle. He looked at the stars and said, "You are very beautiful, but you never helped me. When my brother was beating me, no one came to help me. This universe deprived me of a mother's love."

He said to himself, "Nature doesn't care about human fate. Our life and death are like the life and death of an ant."

Tears flowed from Ahmad's eyes. He cried intensely over his loneliness.

****The Sentence****

It was almost dawn. Finally, he surrendered. He closed his eyes. He stood facing the darkness behind the mountain. He tried to take a long, big leap so he would never return to life. His eyes were closed. He was about to jump.

Suddenly, he heard a walker's voice. The person was talking to someone else. Only one sentence was clear:

****"Don't blame him."****

"Don't blame him" — a strange sentence. Ahmad paused for a moment. He had no thread left to hang onto the universe. That part of him that was fighting for survival tried to use this sentence. A stir grew inside him. An inner conversation started. "Yes," he thought, " 'Don't blame him' means don't blame Kobra. Maybe this last sentence from the universe carries a message."

He sat there for a breathless moment. He cried again. His legs felt weak. His firm resolve loosened a little. He spent the whole next day there too. One part of him invited him toward darkness. Another part said this sentence might carry a message that needs to be tested.

Time passed. Finally, the part connected to survival won. Ahmad came down from the mountain. Exhausted and tired, he moved toward home. He kept repeating the message: "Don't blame him."

****The Mistake****

Ahmad took the sentence he had accidentally heard to mean: "Don't blame Kobra." He tried for two months to be patient with her and find a way to make peace. In the end, Ahmad got tired. He started coming home late from work. Most of the time, he slept at work.

One day, tired from work, he went to the prayer room and slept. When he woke up, it was dark. He started walking home. He saw that his relationship with Kobra hadn't improved. Because of his anger, Kobra had pulled back a little, but no real change was visible.

Ahmad started thinking about darkness again. A great stir and restlessness arose inside him. The dark part said, "Kobra is right. You don't have the guts for anything." Another part was silent. Another part, the one trying to survive, kept analyzing the sentence, thinking it might carry a message.

Suddenly, he became sensitive to the words.

****"Don't blame him."****

Who is "him"? Does it mean Kobra?

Finding the Real Meaning

On the way home, he kept thinking about this sentence. Maybe it meant "Don't blame my mother." Ahmad constantly blamed his mother, especially now that she was old and weak and he was a successful middle-aged man. He constantly reminded her of those days. But he disliked his mother so much that he didn't even want to involve her in this matter.

Maybe it meant his older brother. He hated Sadegh even more than his mother. Sadegh was older now and worked as a small motorcycle courier. Ahmad constantly reminded Sadegh of his past bad behavior. Sadegh kept apologizing, but Ahmad still hated him. He eliminated him too from consideration.

He didn't want to think about his father either. He could never digest or accept what his father did. On one hand, he felt drawn to his father because he was the last person who loved him. On the other hand, his father had run away from his mother and left Ahmad alone. Sometimes Ahmad understood his father, sometimes he called him useless and a coward. So he didn't want to think of his father as the one meant by the sentence.

Now only one person was left.

Himself.

"Don't blame yourself."

The New Rule

Ahmad came home with a simple instruction: **"Don't blame yourself."** It was a strange sentence that, after two months, had finally found its true target. Ahmad decided to follow this sentence for one year—to have just one rule for living: don't blame yourself.

This was the only sentence that could keep him connected to life. Among all the things Ahmad had, even his children couldn't save him from his pull toward darkness. Even though Ahmad had good financial status and worldly comfort, day by day he had been moving closer to darkness and eventually suicide. Now there was only one rope—maybe it could reshape and organize his inner state.

Ahmad came home. Tired, he said, "I'll go to sleep. I'll think about the sentence later. For now, I'll just keep in my mind: don't blame myself." He decided that whatever happened, he would not blame himself. He would not get into arguments with himself.

The first few days went very well. It was as if some inner conversations had been blocked. When Ahmad went for walks, he felt somewhat lighter.

The Transformation

Slowly, Ahmad started feeling better. His inner conversations decreased. Before, he used to think mostly about Kobra, getting caught up in her words, trying to keep her happy. When Kobra criticized him, he would completely fall apart and react very strongly, causing more fights. These days, Ahmad was focused on one central sentence, as if written beautifully on his forehead: **"Don't blame yourself."**

He still had inner conversations, but they were easier and simpler. His inner energy wasn't wasted. He didn't get as tired.

It was as if a fire had been lit inside him. He was amazed to see things inside himself that he had never experienced before. It was as if kindness, gentleness, and delicacy were growing inside him. He was no longer very sensitive to Kobra's words. He didn't take them very seriously anymore. Before, he would take Kobra's words very seriously—if she praised him, he was very happy; if she complained, he was very sad.

It was as if Ahmad had changed inside. The happiness, peace, and excitement he had been searching for outside—he was now experiencing within. A kind of joy and peace was flowing in his heart.

He was no longer very sensitive to his coworkers' words either. He just did his work. Before, Ahmad was very talkative, which sometimes got him into trouble. He talked a lot to get attention and to show that he understood technical matters. But after this change, he became very quiet and rarely talked about himself or his abilities.

Ahmad had become friends with himself. The different parts of him were no longer fighting each other. That's why strange peace had taken over inside him.

****Understanding the Old Wounds****

Ahmad remembered: His mother constantly blamed him. His brother joined her. When Ahmad grew up, he took over this job himself. Whenever something didn't turn out perfectly, he blamed himself harshly.

Ahmad thought, "When I blamed myself, what was really happening? One part of me was attacking another part of me, cursing it. That attacked part would either hide or defend itself."

The part that cursed wanted everything to be orderly and on time, wanted everyone to approve. So it would address another part of him and call it stupid and ignorant. That part it was attacking was his emotions and feelings. That part always had to be ashamed because its actions didn't bring the desired results.

Sometimes, when an argument happened, the feeling part would hide. When that happened, Ahmad had to search for excitement, peace, and happiness in friends. He had to seek approval not from the center of himself but from others. And others—their priority was themselves, not him. Ahmad was just a sideline for others.

Sometimes, the feeling part wouldn't hide. It would defend itself. And this created endless, pointless inner conversations. That part wanted to show its worth to Ahmad, showing in fantasies, and kept fighting with the other part.

****Why the Change Worked****

When Ahmad started following this new path—"Don't blame yourself"—the blamed part inside slowly grew, showed itself, and became stronger. He felt warmth and gentleness on his left side. The endless inner conversations stopped. It was as if, once the blaming part shut down, the feeling part finally had a chance to come forward. It performed. It showed itself to Ahmad in new ways every day. Sometimes as incredible peace settling inside him. Sometimes as quiet kindness taking shape.

After so long, Ahmad had found inside himself what he had been searching for.

His relationship with Kobra entered a new phase. He no longer controlled her. He no longer begged for love. Love was flowing inside him now, and it spread to everyone he had a relationship with.

His relationship with his mother also improved. He no longer saw her as an enemy. He saw her as someone who might have been a victim of something in her own past. He became kinder to her. He stopped fighting with her inside his head.

Toward his brother, his feelings also changed. He no longer saw him as a strong, powerful figure—just someone who hadn't played a constructive role during that time. Ahmad stayed quiet about his father and mostly prayed for him.

****Return to the Mountain****

Three years later, Ahmad decided to go to that mountain again for a walk. He walked there. He followed the walking path. He went back to the top of that rock where he had once wanted to throw himself into the darkness.

He paused for a moment. Then he started laughing. He didn't know what to say. He thanked God and the universe for creating him complete—not lacking anything. Friendship, intimacy, joy, and excitement had been inside him all along. He had been looking for them in the wrong places.

Now, Ahmad felt happiness and peace in his heart. That abandoned, wounded child had healed—by not blaming himself. There was no more hard conversation going on inside him. He no longer searched outside for something he had lost.

Ahmad had become a transformed, different person. He looked at the sky and the stars. He thanked the universe for gifting him meaning, joy, and hope that night.